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U.S. Plans an Inquiry on Barbie

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WASHINGTON, March 14 — The Justice Department said today that it would conduct a full investigation into allegations that the United States Government assisted Klaus Barbie, a twice-convicted Nazi war criminal, to escape to Bolivia after World War II.

The department said that it viewed the allegations "with deep concern" and that an initial review of Government files indicated that the assertions "have sufficient merit to warrant a comprehensive investigation."

The announcement came after days of maneuvering that included a message from William P. Clark, the national security adviser, to Attorney General William French Smith urging him to reverse an earlier refusal and conduct an inquiry into the Barbie case.

Extradited Last Month

Mr. Barbie, the Gestapo chief of Lyons from 1942 to 1944, was extradited from Bolivia to France last month to face charges of wartime murders. He was twice convicted in absentia.

Recent published accounts have suggested that Mr. Barbie was protected and paid by American intelligence agencies after the war and that he made trips to several American cities in 1969 and 1970.

According to authoritative accounts by Justice Department officials, Mr. Smith last week overruled the recommendations of some aides and rejected an investigation into the Barbie case on the ground that after all the years no prosecution was likely to result.

Last Friday, however, officials said Mr. Clark wrote a note to Mr. Smith suggesting that the Justice Department was the place for an investigation after all. The department issued an announcement this afternoon:

"Recent allegations have been made that Klaus Barbie had a relationship

with the United States Government in the years after World War II and that the U.S. Government assisted his travel to Bolivia in 1951.

"We view these allegations with deep concern, and a preliminary review of pertinent Government files indicates that these allegations have sufficient merit to warrant a comprehensive investigation.

"Therefore the Department of Justice is undertaking a full investigation. The object of this investigation is to develop a factual record of any relationship that may have existed between Klaus Barbie and the U.S. Government at any time. A report to Congress and the public will be made as soon as the investigation is completed."